2016-18 Los Angeles Advocacy Council (LAAC) Accomplishments

The LAAC is a 17-member steering committee made up of charter school leaders representing different school types, geographies, and policy focuses. The Council is responsible for defining the scope of CCSA's advocacy priorities on behalf of the collective charter school movement in Los Angeles. LAAC members operate 86 schools serving 42,250 students, approximately 40% of the independent charter schools and students within the District. The LAAC's mission is to transform the public school system so that all district and charter students have access to high-quality public schools. The Council's vision is to unify the L.A. charter community in voice and action with a commitment to sustain and grow high-quality charter schools in which every student achieves at the highest level. The guiding values of the LAAC are to be united, bold, and focused on quality growth.

Since being founded in 2016, the Los Angeles Advocacy Council (LAAC) has united the charter community in voice and action to change the local authorizing environment within the Los Angeles Unified School District. The LAAC's accomplishments to date are described in detail below.

Authorizing and Oversight

- Initiated the Charter Community Authorization and Oversight survey that provided hard data demonstrating the gaps between District policy and practice, which has been the foundation for subsequent collective advocacy efforts.
- Coordinated charter community advocacy including collective letters and speakers to oppose the unprecedented uptick in charter denial recommendations in October 2016, resulting in the approval of all petitions at LAUSD, the County, or the state, and spurring the District to distribute "early warning" letters to schools prior to non-renewal, creating a more predictable local authorizing environment.
- Coordinated a charter community collective letter to the State Board of Education (SBE) signed raising concerns with LAUSD authorization and oversight, resulting in an in-person meeting with SBE President Michael Kirst to raise concerns with L.A. Unified authorizing practices.
- Secured major policy improvements through collective action resulting in substantive policy updates in the areas of special education, facilities, dispute resolution, charter policy, and closure procedure through District Required Language (DRL) pushback and negotiations with the District.
- Won "universal" District Required Language (DRL) ensuring all charter schools District-wide would benefit from the policy improvements in the fall, created a defined list of which policies apply to charters for the first time, and also secured major protections for the charter community moving authority to modify DRL in the future to the Board, away from the Charter Schools Division.
- Advocated against the District's use of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for charter school oversight in 2017 letter to the State Board of Education and during DRL negotiations, resulting ultimately in modifications to OIG workplan in June 2018 removing charter investigations from the scope of work.
- Advocated for improved charter renewal criteria, pushing back against the unclear and subjective criteria used for by the Charter Schools Division, resulting in a "Listen and Learn" sessions with the Charter Schools Division, and subsequently leading to meetings with Superintendent Austin Beutner to establish new criteria prior to the 2018-19 renewal cycle.
- Facilitated a "strike preparedness" committee to prepared for the threat of a potential UTLA strike, bringing the charter community to consensus that schools would stay open should UTLA strike, and drafting a collective statement that will serve as the foundation for the charter community's messaging if a strike should occur.
- Convened a communications committee to work in collaboration with CCSA to provide feedback on content and implementation of the "Discover Charter Schools" public awareness campaign.

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Facilities

- Coordinated collective responses to UTLA's escalation of anti-colocation attacks
- Advocated successfully to secure changes to the membership qualifications for CCSA's appointment to the Bond Oversight Committee (BOC) enabling Michael Keeley's continued Service as the CCSA/charter community representative to the BOC.
- Approved and advocated for the charter community's public facilities proposal. In response to our advocacy efforts, Board Members Melvoin and Garcia called on the District to identify a viable path forward to move away from disruptive single-year facilities agreements. We continue to navigate a multi-pronged approach to work towards long-term facilities offers for the 2019-20 school year.
- Approved and advocated for the charter community's bond proposal, laying the foundation for charter inclusion in a possible 2020 District facilities bond.

Relationships

- Advocated for improved collaboration between the charter community and District, resulting in former Superintendent Michelle King's first charter-District "Promising Practices Forum".
- Developed strong, consistent relationships with L.A. Unified board members, coordinating monthly LAAC meetings with board members to advocate for LAAC priorities.
- Established new relationships with District staff, originally engaging Michelle King, and then subsequently engaging both Frances Gipson and Vivian Ekchian during DRL negotiations, taking decision-making power away from the Charter Schools Division.
- Developed charter community survey identifying the shared skills and priorities the charter community sought in a new leader at L.A. Unified, wrote op-eds, and advocated alongside CCSA and other education reform organizations to help influence the Board's selection of Austin Beutner as the new L.A. Unified Superintendent.